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SERMON BY THE RIGHT REV. SAMUEL SEABURY.

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THE NATURE OF TEMPTATION:

A Sermon,

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James i. 13–15.—"*Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of* GOD; *for* GOD *cannot be tempted of evil, neither tempteth he any man. But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then, when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.*"

THE circumstances of our present life will convince every considerate man, that he is in this world in a state of trial and probation,—of education and discipline. He is constantly exposed to a variety of temptations. If he complies with them, he falls into sin, and an uneasy conscience becomes his portion, unless customary sinning hath hardened his heart, and worn from his mind the impressions of goodness.

If this life be our trial for happiness in a life to succeed, and *temptations* be the mode of that trial, and constitute a course of discipline to prepare us for that happiness, they are easily reconcilable with the goodness of our Creator, and are, in truth, so many instances of it. On any other supposition, they bear hard on the benevolence of ALMIGHTY GOD. By his providence we are placed in this world, and subjected to a variety of temptations, all tending to draw us away from our duty, and from that propriety of conduct which our reasonable nature points out, and his laws require. If no advantage is to come from them, and they conduce nothing to our future happiness, hard, indeed, is the lot of human nature. Defiled by the apostacy of the first man,—sunk in weakness,—subjected to passions,—surrounded by temptations, and prone to comply with them,—anxiously foreboding the anger of GOD for its transgressions of the divine law, its only prospect is inevitable misery.

That we may not charge God rashly, nor doubt of his goodness to his creatures, let it be remembered, that every creature must be made happy in a way suited to its nature. Reasonable, intelligent creatures must, therefore, be made happy in a way suited to their reasonable, intelligent nature. The will of all intelligent creatures must be free, or they cannot be accountable. Reasonable creatures must therefore be made happy in a way which leaves them the full liberty of their will, or they cannot be happy at all.

How such a creature can arrive at perfect happiness without a state of trial, is hard to conceive. How, without trial, shall it be known how, or which way, the will of such a creature will determine itself, under a variety of circumstances? whether he prefers good to evil, truth to falsehoood? How shall the creature himself know the different consequences of the different tendencies of his own will, till he has learned something from experience? A state of trial and discipline is, therefore, necessary for all intelligent creatures; nor can they be conducted to the true and perfect happiness of their nature without it.

It is, therefore, no impeachment of the goodness of God, that he placed man in a state from which he might fall by disobedience. It was necessary, in order to conduct him to the true and perfect happiness of his nature, that a trial should be made of his disposition to submit himself wholly to the will of his Creator, from whence only perfect happiness to the creature can arise.

Nor is it any argument against the goodness of God, that we are in this world surrounded by temptations. They are necessary to lead us to happiness; and it is only by resisting and overcoming them, that we can rise out of our evil state of apostacy from God; on account of which, and of the personal transgressions of the divine law, of which every man is guilty, it was, that the goodness of God sent his Son to be our Redeemer. If obedience to God was necessary to the happiness of the first man, it must be necessary to the happiness of all men. Obedience, therefore, is as necessary for us as it was for Adam. But, can we have the principle of obedience in us,

unless we renounce the apostacy of our nature, and all the evil tempers and passions that flow from it? Can we renounce these any other way than by resisting and overcoming the temptations which arise from them? Temptations are, therefore, necessary for us, because there is no other way for us to rise from the apostacy of our nature, and to become superior to the evil propensities that spring from it, than through the strength of our Redeemer, imparted to us in the presence and power of the Holy Spirit of GOD, by overcoming the temptations to which those propensities expose us, and to which they owe their whole strength. The whole system of our religion, its precepts, its doctrines, its institutions, all proclaim the necessity of dying to sin and living to righteousness, of putting off the *old man* with his *deceitful lusts*, and putting on the *new man*, in *righteousness and true holiness*, (Eph. iv. 22, 24;) with many other similar expressions, all strongly denoting the necessity of renouncing the apostacy of our nature with all its evil affections, and conforming ourselves to the purity of GOD's laws. The whole system of our religion, therefore, bears witness to the necessity of our being tempted, that, in the denial of the temptation, our obedience to GOD may appear, and grow into a confirmed habit; and that by the frequent repetition of acts of self-denial, the principles and practice of virtue and holiness may be strengthened, so as to become an overbalance to the depravity of our nature.

For this reason the author of the text, in the beginning of his epistle, directs Christians to *count it* a matter of *joy, when they fall into divers temptations;* because the *trying of their faith*, their confidence in GOD's promises and dependence on his goodness, *worketh patience;* steady, approved perseverance in their duty. And *let patience have her perfect work*, saith he; i. e. faint not under tribulation and affliction by which your *faith* is tried, but persevere in your duty, *that ye may be perfect* in your obedient disposition, *and entire, wanting nothing*, in the divine graces and virtues of your holy religion.

Again, in the verse before the text, he repeateth the same sentiment:—*Blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for when he is tried*, is sufficiently proved, and endureth the trial,

he shall receive the crown of life, which the LORD *hath promised to them that love him.*

There is, therefore, no sin in being tempted : it is the common lot of our nature ; and through temptation lies our road to happiness with GOD. But, as temptation implies excitement and solicitation to sin, *let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of* GOD : for all sin, every thing that is evil, being contrary to his nature, he cannot tempt any one to it. This is the Apostle's argument in the text, GOD *cannot be tempted of evil* himself, therefore *neither tempteth he any man.*

The testimony of holy Scripture, therefore, concurs with the voice of reason to establish this great truth, that GOD cannot, either directly or indirectly, by his will, his decrees, or his providence, be the author or promoter of sin,—of any thing that is evil, because it is impossible he should act contrary to his nature.

The Scripture not only establishes this fundamental truth of religion, that no temptations to sin can come from GOD, but it discovers the true sources from which they all do arise.

1st. They arise from the devil, the enemy of GOD and all goodness. He is called, also, *the evil one ;* because, by rebelling against his Creator, he became the origin and author of *all* the evil in the creation ;—the *tempter*, because he tempted Adam, and has since tempted all his posterity to sin against GOD, by disobeying his commands ;—the *destroyer*, because by leading men into sin, he leads them to misery and destruction.

2dly. They arise from the world in which we live. The pleasures which arise from the world are too agreeable to the appetites of our nature to be always resisted by us. They engage our affections, and tempt us to look to them for happiness, rather than to the love and favor of GOD.

3dly. The appetites and passions of men are another source of temptation. These are natural to us ; but their evil tendency comes not from GOD : it arises from the depravity of our apostate nature.

As it is through these appetites that the *evil one* hath any access to tempt us, and by which we are capable of enjoying the sensual pleasures and vanities of the world, and are filled

with pride and envy, and other evil tempers, the Apostle has mentioned this only as the grand source of temptation, and says, *Every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed,* (literally, *being drawn and enticed by his own lust.*) *Then, when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.*

Hence it appears, that though temptation be an excitement to sin, yet, unless it obtain the compliance of our own inclinations it is harmless. When we are drawn away from our duty by our own lusts and evil propensities, and enticed to act contrary to the will of God, we become criminal; *lust hath conceived, and bringeth forth sin.* And when the consent of the will is given, *sin is finished, and bringeth forth death.*

Those sudden desires after forbidden pleasures, or unlawful gratifications of any kind, which spring up in us without our knowledge, or against our will, and which are checked and repressed as soon as perceived, bring no guilt with them. They are our infirmity, the consequence of the weakness of our present nature. We cannot always prevent them; and nothing can raise us superior to them but a long course of self-denial, and a steady perseverance in a devout and holy life.

There is also this advantage arising from them; by denying and keeping them under, they become the means of increasing our faith and patience, and of bringing every heavenly disposition to maturity in us. But if we indulge them,—if the mind pursue them and dwell on them, they make us guilty before God, who hath commanded us to subdue them. *Lust hath* then *conceived,* and is ready to bring forth sin. If we go further, consent to them, and contrive how to gratify them, our guilt is completed; sin is finished and bringeth forth death, even though it should never be in our power to fulfil them.

God estimates our good deeds more from the good desires and intentions of the heart, than from the act itself, which sometimes is out of our power. So will our evil deeds be estimated more from the consent of the will, which makes them morally evil, than from the commission of the act, which, notwithstanding all our endeavors, may never be in our power;

and which, when accomplished, can only increase the evil, by adding to it scandal and injury to others.

It is, therefore, a matter of great consequence to us, what desires and passions we indulge. The desires and passions are the instruments with which the soul works, and forms for itself its own state, either of happiness or misery, according as it cherishes those which are conformable, or contrary, to the nature of GOD.

We cannot fall into a greater mistake, than to suppose that the tempers, desires, passions, and habits which we indulge in this life, will have no influence on our future state. This notion, probably, keeps more men easy in their vices, and hardens them in their impenitency, than any other imagination. They suppose nothing will keep them out of heaven, but the arbitrary will and determination of GOD; and they flatter themselves that his goodness and mercy will interpose, and prevent his executing this determination with rigor. It needs but little consideration to convince us of the folly of such a fancy.

The will of GOD must always operate according to the nature of GOD. We are told by an inspired Apostle, that, *without holiness no man shall see the* LORD. (Heb. xii. 14.) The reason GOD himself assigned, when he said to the Israelites, *Ye shall be holy, for I am holy*, (Lev. xi. 44; xix. 2;) which St. Peter applies to Christians, and repeats it thus, *Be ye holy, for I am holy*, (1 Pet. i. 16.) The same sentiment was delivered by the blessed JESUS, when he said, *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see* GOD.

To suppose that GOD requires holiness and purity of heart in his creatures, that they may be happy with him, because holiness and purity are agreeable to his nature, he being holy and pure; but that his goodness and mercy can dispense with them, and make an unholy impure creature happy in heaven, is too great an absurdity for any but an enthusiast to fall into. It is to set the nature of GOD at variance with itself, and impute opposition to the attributes of the Most High. It is the nature of GOD to be just, and holy, and pure, and merciful, and good. All these qualities subsist together in Him in perfect unity, so as to make one nature. He does not *will* one thing

according to his justice, and another thing according to his mercy, but every thing according to justice, and holiness, and goodness, and mercy, agreeably to the infinite perfection of his own nature. Besides, contrary tempers and dispositions cannot be happy together, because they cannot be pleased with the same enjoyments. It does not, therefore, appear how an unholy, impure, impenitent sinner could be happy in heaven, supposing it possible for the mercy of GOD to admit him into it.

The foundation of our happiness with GOD must be laid in the conformity of our nature to his; i. e. we must become like him in tempers and dispositions; for, in a moral sense, the tempers and dispositions of any being constitute its nature. To be happy with GOD, we must therefore love what *he loves*, choose what *he chooses*, and *will* what *he wills*. This is evidently the determination of reason, and it is confirmed by authority of holy Scripture.

St. Paul hath expressed himself decidedly on the subject, (Rom. viii. 29:) *Whom* GOD *did foreknow, he did also predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son;* i. e. those whom GOD *foreknew* would be obedient to his heavenly calling—the Gospel of his Son; he did also *predestinate*—determine—that they should *be conformed to the image of his Son;*—become in temper and disposition like the Son of GOD, that they might be capable of happiness with GOD. To be *conformed to the image of the Son of* GOD, has just the same meaning with being *conformed to* GOD; for the *Son is the brightness of the Father's glory, the express image of his person.* (Heb. i. 3.)

We have also the authority of St. Peter to the same purpose, (2 Pet. i. 4:) *Whereby*—by our calling to the profession of the Gospel—*are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises; that by these*—by living as that holy religion which contains those promises directs—*ye might be made partakers of the divine nature, having escaped* (from) *the corruption that is in the world through lust,* (by resisting and overcoming the temptations which arise from it.) In what sense men can *be made partakers of the divine nature*, otherwise than by becoming of divine tempers and dispositions, is not easy to conceive.

It appears, then, that to be happy with GOD, we must

become possessed of such tempers and dispositions as will render us capable of heavenly happiness. To produce these divine tempers in us, the Son of God hath redeemed us from the servitude of sin, and from the apostacy of our nature; hath called us out of the world, that we might no longer live in its corrupt tempers and practices; hath brought us into his Church, and given us his Holy Spirit, that under his holy inspirations we might be enabled to resist temptations, and acquire those holy tempers, dispositions, and habits which make us partakers of the divine nature, conformed to the image of the Son of God, that we might thereby rise from the depravity of our fallen state, and become capable of happiness with our God.

From what has been said, the necessity of *watching* continually against temptations must be apparent to every one. If we do not keep a guard over our desires and inclinations, and stand ready to repress all evil thoughts and propensities in their first beginnings, we shall be in great danger of being drawn away from our duty; the temptation will probably prove too strong for us, and will lead us into sin and guilt, the sure parents of misery. No remedy will then remain for us, but deep and thorough repentance, which, to our great comfort, the atonement of Jesus hath made it possible for God to accept.

Another reason why we ought particularly to attend to our desires, and watch over our hearts, is, that we may be ready to support and cherish all good purposes and holy wishes that shall at any time form themselves within us. These are the motions and inspirations of the Holy Ghost; the beginnings, the first shoots of those divine tempers and dispositions which make us conformed to the Son of God, and partakers of the divine nature. Our attending to them, and complying with them, is what is meant in the Scripture by our walking in the Spirit; being led and governed by the Spirit, doing the works of the Spirit, and because they proceed from the Spirit of God —the Author of every thing that is good—they are called the fruits of the Spirit. If we comply with these holy suggestions, they will, by the power and holy energy of their divine principle, grow, and come to maturity in us, and will form our

capacity of happiness with God. On the contrary, the *resisting*, *grieving*, *quenching*, and *driving away* the Spirit, of which we read in the Bible, mean the *resisting*, *quenching*, and *driving away* the holy desires, virtuous purposes, and holy wishes, which rise and form themselves in us. If we do so, we renounce and preclude ourselves from all capacity of heavenly happiness. Judge now for yourselves what your state is, and what is proper for you to do. If we will abide the decision of holy Scripture, this life is the time in which our capacity for the happiness of heaven must be obtained. At death, the soul is to go to the place prepared for it; either of peace and refreshment with holy spirits, or of anxious foreboding of what is to follow when the dreadful judgment of the last day shall take place, which shall award every one according to the deeds done in the body. At which time that we find a happy acquittal, and hear that joyful voice, Come, &c., God, &c.

FAITHFUL COUNSELLORS HATED.

A Sermon,

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I. Kings xxii. 8.—"*There is yet one man, by whom we may inquire of the* Lord: *but I hate him; for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil.*"

Ahab, the wicked king of Israel, was surrounded by false prophets, whom he honored and trusted, because they flattered him in his evil doings, encouraged him in fulfilling the desires of his heart, and were careful to make all their answers to his inquiries, and all their predictions, such as would gratify his inclinations, and imbolden him to accomplish his own will. At the time the words of the text were spoken, Ahab had just consulted with four hundred of these false prophets, on the question, whether he should go up to war against Ramoth-Gilead: and they had bidden him go, and the Lord should deliver it into his hands; for they perceived that his heart was bent upon the undertaking, and they would

not thwart his wishes. But Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, who was with him at the time, was not satisfied with the responses of these prophets, and inquired, "Whether there was not there a prophet of the LORD beside, that they might consult him?" The reply of Ahab was in the words of the text,—"There is yet one man, Micaiah, the son of Imlah, by whom we may inquire of the LORD: but I hate him; for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil." We know nothing more of Micaiah than what is recorded of him on this occasion. Though hated by Ahab, he was, at the request of Jehoshaphat, summoned to the royal presence, to give his advice in relation to the contemplated battle against Ramoth-Gilead. He spake boldly against the measure,—predicted that it would result in the death of Ahab, and represented the four hundred prophets as animated by a lying spirit. For his fidelity in speaking agreeably to the Divine will, and daring to give such unpalatable counsel, he was ordered to be thrown into prison. His further history is unknown; as his name is mentioned no where but in this chapter, and in the parallel chapter of Chronicles. He appears to have been a true prophet of GOD, standing nearly alone in Israel, amid the hundreds of pretenders to inspiration,—a judicious, faithful, and fearless counsellor, and on that very account most unwelcome to a wicked prince and his corrupt court. He had probably often been sent to Ahab with the message of GOD, and had often denounced against him the displeasure and the judgments of heaven for his ambitious and impious schemes. While the false prophets and courtiers flattered the king with brilliant anticipations, and urged him onward in his career of folly and madness, Micaiah probably often opposed his projects, and endeavored to restrain him in his headlong course, by serious expostulations, warnings, and threatenings. That he had frequently done so, may be inferred from the phraseology of the text, and more especially from the corresponding passage in 2 *Chronicles*, where Ahab says, "He never prophesieth good unto me, but always evil." The remonstrances of this man of GOD were, in the present case, as formerly, disregarded, and his prediction was accomplished; for the kings went forth to the battle, and Ahab was slain.

This little fragment of the sacred history strongly reminds us of a number of facts, which are attested by the history of all ages; and suggests a train of reflections which it may not be unprofitable occasionally to indulge.

I. Faithful counsellors, of stern integrity and inflexible virtue, who are resolutely determined at all times to be guided by the strict principles of truth, justice, and honor,—who steadily seek to promote the welfare of the government and the happiness of the nation,—who will never consent that these paramount objects be sacrificed to the pleasure, the ambition, or the caprice of the reigning powers, seldom enjoy much favor at court. If they be brought near to the throne, and allowed for a time to sit in high places, where they can speak in the ear of sovereignty, not long is their station retained,—not long does their influence last. Their counsel is rejected, their voice unlistened to, and themselves become the objects of hatred and persecution. And why? because they are too honest and unbending to give their voice for gratifying the whims of a ruler, at the expense of justice, honor, and the public good. They will not sear and stifle their consciences, and assent to the doing of that which they know to be wrong in itself, or ruinous in its tendency. They will not cast behind them the rules of equity and common sense; nor violate the most sacred laws, and cringe, and fawn, and flatter, and lie, like the false prophets of Ahab, for the sake of pleasing their superior and retaining his smiles. When they see their sovereign adopting impolitic and injurious measures, or prosecuting schemes of a wild, disgraceful, ruinous character, they do not, courtier-like, cheer him on and promise him success and glory. They dare to approach him as honest men, and as true friends, and to warn him of the consequences of his unwise conduct. They dare to address him in the plain, earnest language of undissembled truth,—to expostulate with him,—to paint before him the defeat, the disasters, the shame, that must result. This is their crime. A tyrant cannot make them subservient to the lawless gratification of his will. He cannot compel them to be complaisant enough to advise him to go wherever he has determined to go,—to bid him God-speed in all that he chooses to under-

take,—and to sanction and applaud his follies and crimes. They stand too much in his way, and too frequently trouble him by interposing the claims of law and equity, and reminding him of his conscience and of his God. Although, therefore, he is assured of their integrity, yet he cannot tolerate them. He drives them from his presence, and heaps upon them his displeasure, because they will not blindly indorse his unrighteous decisions, and obsequiously minister to the gratification of his unholy and unreasonable wishes. The language of his heart toward them is, "I hate them; for they do not prophesy good concerning me, but evil." It was for such strict adherence to sound principles, such faithful discharge of duty, without fear of consequences, that Jeremiah was cast into a dungeon, Elijah hunted like a wild beast, John the Baptist beheaded, and others of the ancient teachers of divine truth and rebukers of princes, were persecuted, imprisoned, and put to death. The history of nations, from the earliest period to the present, abounds in similar examples of ministers of state, able and good men, incurring the royal displeasure, being hurled from their eminence, spending their life in disgrace and wretchedness, or terminating it upon a scaffold. And for what? Their sole crime was their unyielding virtue and patriotism. They refused to sacrifice every thing to the passions of a tyrannical master. They presumed to doubt the infallibility of his dicta, and to stand up manfully, for God and their country, in opposition to his arbitrary will. A man who will not always consider the inclinations of those in power as law, and readily veer with every change in their humor, and study to conform his words and actions to the dictates of their pleasure, whether right or wrong, has ordinarily but a slight chance of long retaining political elevation or influence.

II. The most acceptable courtiers, and the most successful aspirants to offices and honors in the gift of a prince, it may be concluded from what has been said, are too frequently not the most meritorious, not the most capable, not those who would steadily aim to promote the best interests of the country; but those who are most crafty to insinuate themselves into his good graces,—most skilful to flatter his vanity,—most prompt to

coincide with him upon all occasions,—most zealous in advocating his views and forwarding his schemes,—in brief, those who are the most selfish, intriguing, regardless of truth, destitute of fixed and sound principles of conduct, animated by the single motive of their own advancement, and ready to sacrifice conscience and honor for the attainment of that one grand object. Such were Ahab's prophets: for in those days, it should be remembered, the concerns of religion, whether true or false, were in every nation so intimately allied to those of the civil government, that the chief ministers of religion were, almost as a matter of course, ministers or counsellors of state. What was the character of those four hundred, as it appears upon the page of inspiration? A lying spirit was in them. They were hypocrites and dissemblers, seeking to please the king, and to maintain their own importance by the utterance of falsehoods which they knew would be grateful to his ears, and by misrepresenting the Divine will, in order to encourage him in his wickedness. Their only aim was to ascertain his wish, and then unconscionably to make every thing in earth and heaven minister to its gratification. By such unprincipled men is every prince surrounded; and wo to his country, wo to himself, when folly, passion, or caprice leads him to take them into favor, and to listen to them as his guides and counsellors! They will, for their own present advantage, not shrink from involving the country in disasters, and encouraging him to rush upon the ruin, from which honest men would, at the risk of his displeasure, have restrained him. Hence the proverbial insincerity of courtiers, by whom our great men are thronged, and the general distrust with which they are viewed. The precincts of a palace or a court are often justly regarded as unfriendly to the growth of virtue, if not fatal to its existence. Hence high-minded and honorable men, who were too manly to cringe, too upright and conscientious to attempt to sustain themselves in political power by arts of falsehood, bribery, and corruption, have often refused places of distinction under government, or retired from them with disgust. At an unprincipled court they choose, like Micaiah, to be classed with those who are hated for their

integrity, rather than with those who meanly purchase a residence in a polluted atmosphere, and the enjoyment of a little brief authority, at the expense of the most precious and noble virtues of the human heart.

III. On descending to private life, and looking at the narrower sphere of our social intercourse, we find similar examples of conduct, exhibiting the same spirit which has already passed under our consideration. Is it not too apt to be the case with us, that we most love and favor those who take pains to flatter our vanity; to concur with us in every thing, right or wrong; to vindicate our follies, and faults, and vices; to encourage and strengthen us in a course of error; and, by the expression of their favorable opinion, to make us better satisfied with ourselves in the doing of what is evil? It is even so, as proved by every day's experience among all classes and all ages, from prattling infancy to tottering four-score. We sometimes see a virtuous youth become strangely and strongly attached to vicious associates. Perhaps he knows their character, disapproves their practices, abhors their loose, immoral, irreligious principles; but he loves them still. They have found their way to his heart, and acquired over him an influence, by means of which they may gradually assimilate his character to their own, and lead him unresisting down the path of iniquity, and shame, and ruin. And how is this to be accounted for? The tongue of flattery has effected the mischief. They exhibit to him a show of high regard; they humor his inclinations, indulge his whims, play upon his foibles and passions, fulfil his wishes, and gratify his vanity. They zealously counsel and assist him to do whatsoever they perceive that his heart desires. This is the magic, this the secret charm, which makes him lavish his affections and favors upon the undeserving; and press to his bosom, as his dearest friends, those whom he ought to shun as the deadliest foes to his reputation and happiness. And in the meantime, how does he esteem those whose true regard for his welfare induces them to warn him of danger, to admonish him frankly, to rebuke and restrain him? They ought, indeed, to be objects of his warmest love, and of his highest confidence: but, alas! his heart is estranged from them. Its language is, "I hate

them;" for they do not gratify my will,—they cross my inclinations,—they discourage and withhold me from the pursuit of pleasures which are dearest to me. "I hate them; for they do not prophesy good concerning me, but evil." Substantially the same things may be witnessed in persons of maturer age, and in every period of life. Do we not often behold men led, by what seems an unaccountable infatuation, to distrust and hate their best friends; to turn away from their candid and judicious counsels; and to lend a willing ear to the more honied accents of interested and wily men, till finally they become the victims of flattering sharpers and crafty fortune-hunters? It has been said, though not with strict justice, that every man has his price; and it seems to be unquestionable that the price at which you may purchase, and hoodwink, and plunge into ruin, a very large class of persons, is the incense of skilful flattery. Find out the weak points in their character, whether love of pleasure, personal vanity, avarice, or ambition: humor them in these matters,—make them pleased with themselves, and they will be pleased with you; and you may lead them almost where you will, if it be down a precipice. How much better would it have been for Ahab, had he turned a deaf ear to the delusive promises of the lying prophets, and meekly received the unwelcome, but salutary truths spoken by Micaiah! How true is the maxim, that better are the rebukes of a friend, than the flatteries of an enemy!

IV. Lastly, we perceive in the text the reason why there exists, in many minds, so strong an aversion to the Bible, to pure religion, and to the faithful, uncompromising teachers of Christianity. Of these, the ungodly man would say, in his heart, "I hate them,"—because they will not let him rest in his sins; because they will not cloak his offences, flatter his pride, and encourage him to follow the devices and desires of his own wicked heart. He hates the Bible, because it describes the vileness of such as himself, and records against him the sentence of eternal condemnation and shame. He hates a religion whose pure light penetrates even into the recesses of his most hidden thoughts and intents, and startles and vexes his slumbering conscience. He hates the ambassador of God, whose candid

and faithful dealing is a continual rebuke for his ungodly and iniquitous practices. How easy would it be, if we could so grossly neglect our duty, and prostitute our sacred office to the purposes of a time-serving policy; how easy would it be to secure his approbation, and that of the multitude who are like him! It would only be to prophesy smooth things,—to proclaim peace, though there be no peace,—to speak lies unto them in the name of the LORD,—to pervert the Scriptures for their comfort,—to bid them fulfil their own desires, with the assurance that the mercy of GOD shall overshadow them,—to encourage them to go up to Ramoth-Gilead, with the blessing of heaven,—though we well know that they will go to their own destruction, and will perish under the wrath of the ALMIGHTY.

I would conclude by remarking, that there are two lessons deducible from the preceding reflections; and we shall all do well to imprint them upon our memories. 1. You are in continual danger, in this wicked world, of becoming dupes, in one way or other, to unprincipled, designing men, who would make gain of you, blind you to the light of truth, and lead you in the way of transgression and death. Be on your guard against flatterers and deceivers. Beware of the soothing and pleasant counsels of those who are enemies to true godliness. Their words will eat as doth a canker. By their fruits shall ye know them. 2. On the other hand, you are in danger of contracting an indifference or antipathy to those who feel for you the purest friendship; because this friendship may, when circumstances seem to require, be manifested in the giving of plain advice and wholesome cautions, which may not, at the moment, exactly harmonize with your plans, your prejudices, or your passions. Remembering your liability to err, endeavor to keep your minds always open to the reception of truth, however unwelcome to the natural heart. Never reject it because it comes in a form that you dislike, or from a source that you hate. In all your undertakings, see that you act not in opposition to the Divine will; and resolve to be guided by those counsels which are in strict accordance with the holy Scriptures. So shall the protection and blessing of GOD attend you in all your ways, and you shall finally receive the crown of life.